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The Business Meeting: A Cross-cultural Experiential Learning Activity

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a simulation designed to help students learn about the challenges and necessary skills for conducting business in cross-cultural settings. The exercise involves assigning participants to two fictitious cultural groups, each with its own norms and expectations. Participants interact with members of the other culture in accordance with the instructions provided in order to negotiate successfully. This experiential learning activity allows students to reflect on their cross-cultural skills in a simulated business setting. An assessment of the exercise conducted in classroom setting indicated evidence of its effectiveness.

KEYWORDS

Cross-culture; negotiation; groups; experiential learning; simulation

Bevan and Kipka (2012) recognized the benefits of experiential learning and noted that in today's dynamic business environment, learning is at the heart of successful adaptation by individuals and organizations. Drawing from Peacock, Lopez, and Sukal (2007), we argue that allowing business students to participate in a memorable experience illustrating key points and then reflecting on them will help them to learn the lessons effectively. Experiential learning is especially helpful when it comes to competencies involving recognizing and appreciating differences between people, such as cultural values. Consequently, cross-cultural simulations that allow students to recognize differences in cultural values and navigate the challenges associated with them are very helpful for future international managers. Hence, we designed the Business Meeting simulation to help with experiential learning of cross-cultural negotiations. We have used it to teach aspects of cross-cultural management and leadership in both graduate and undergraduate programs. This simulation is designed for use in courses on International Business, Cross-cultural Management, Global Leadership, Human Resource Management, and is suitable for students that are particularly interested in an international management career involving business interactions with other cultures.

The rest of the paper is divided into three main sections. The following section provides a brief literature review highlighting the importance of this experiential learning activity. The next section discusses the Business Meeting exercise. Then, we conclude the

paper with a discussion on debriefing of the exercise, the lessons learned and an assessment of its effectiveness.

Significance of cross-cultural simulation

Experiential learning theory (ELT), one of the most prevalent theories of how managers learn from experience, proposes that experiential learning such as simulations encompass the totality of human learning process and that experience shapes the foundation of four modes of learning, i.e. feeling, reflecting, thinking & acting (Kolb, 1984). Prior studies have found evidence of positive change in cultural awareness as a result of participation in cross-cultural simulations such as Bafa-Bafa (Pruegger & Rogers, 1994). This evidence demonstrates the importance of a versatile and meaningful simulation in identifying cultural differences in interactions between participants of a cross-cultural simulation (Sullivan & Duplaga, 1997).

In order to demonstrate competent cross-cultural behavior, students need to be trained to focus on the relevant behavioral intentions and beliefs in cross-cultural setting and that can be achieved through the use of experiential learning technique (Christian & Gumbus, 2009). Experiential learning allows for active immersion and participation of students and fosters depth of learning that is not possible when relying exclusively on more traditional teaching techniques (Peters & Yanagi, 2006). The Business Meeting simulation aims to incorporate the four modes of learning

(Kolb, 1984) so that participants can learn from their experience through active immersion.

According to Black and Mendenhall (1989), cross-cultural training has become a necessity for successful management. Lenartowicz, Johnson, and Konopaske (2014) noted that training methods that are factual and not experiential are successful in transferring explicit knowledge, but not tacit knowledge despite much of cultural knowledge being tacit. Experiential learning methods, with routine inclusion of experiential training such as Kolb's (1984) and Bhawuk's (1998), facilitate the transfer of tacit cultural knowledge. Despite growing diversity in classrooms and corporate teams, Ramburuth and Welch (2005) noted limited cross-cultural interaction between various cultural groups. Thus, the challenge is to create a simulation for students, educators and trainers in international business that promotes and develops cross-cultural competency through these complex dimensions, within the limits of time constraints and structure of courses offered in a holistic manner (Poitras, Stimec, & Hill, 2013). Research has shown the following key elements to be important for successful cross-cultural training programs – assessment, content, design, program duration, timing, trainers, training team and quality assurance (Bennett, Aston, & Coiquhoun, 2000). An effective simulation strives to incorporate these elements to the extent possible.

Cross-cultural competency is a skill that has been consistently identified as being relevant for international managers (Ramburuth & Welch, 2005). Yet, management students face the daunting task of tapping into the full benefits of the diversity present at their institutions that is made challenging by the differences in cultural values, traditions, etc. (Dietz et al., 2017). We believe it is important to provide them the tools to identify the differences in culture and learn how to bridge them effectively. Cross-cultural adaptability, defined in terms of one's ability to interact with people different from themselves or adapt to living in unfamiliar environment, is important for success in international settings (Kelley & Meyers, 1995; Nguyen, Biderman, & McNary, 2010). Cross-cultural adaptability inventory (CCAI), developed by Kelley and Meyers (1995) is useful to determine an individual's ability to navigate cross-cultural challenges. It has four dimensions (Kelley & Meyers, 1995): (1) *emotional resilience* (ER) reflecting “confidence in one's ability to cope with the unfamiliar and to react positively to new experiences”, (2) *flexibility/openness* (FO) related to “tolerance, lack of rigidity, and a liking for and comfort with all kinds of people”, (3) *perceptual acuity* (PAC) associated “with attentiveness to interpersonal relations

and to verbal and nonverbal behaviour”, and (4) *personal autonomy* (PA) related to the strong sense of identity and “the ability to maintain one's own personal values and beliefs”. Drawing from these, we argue that it is important to have an appropriate learning tool to help future managers understand the potential impact of cultural differences on business and adapt themselves effectively to challenging cross-cultural situations.

Cross-cultural training of future international business executives will enable them to understand target cultures norms and expectations as well as adapt to them. With this objective in mind, we designed the Business Meeting simulation to allow students to experience situations where they have to correctly identify the differences between the culture they are exposed to and their assigned culture. Additionally, they need to figure out how to complete their task successfully in the culturally different setting. Consequently, this exercise is designed to help students learn about and identify the fundamental skills needed to adapt in an unfamiliar cross-cultural setting. This exercise demonstrates how an appropriate understanding of cultural frameworks can help achieve this objective.

Differences in cultures exist because they vary in terms of the cultural dimensions. Hence, in order to design the two cultures, we used various cultural frameworks and drew select characteristics from significantly different cultures that could be recreated in a classroom. At the same time, we expected these differences to create potential challenges during their cross-cultural encounters, which in turn would facilitate learning. So, we used cultural frameworks for our design. For instance, we drew from Schwartz (2011) and used autonomy-embeddedness to differentiate the nature of the relations and boundaries between a person and a group in the two cultures. While autonomy implies people in that culture are autonomous entities who can cultivate and express themselves, embeddedness emphasizes importance of identification with a group and its objectives while resisting potential disruptions to in-group solidarity or traditional social order (Schwartz, 2011). Consequently, cultures reflecting embeddedness are more patriarchal and formal in relationships, and tend to avoid conflict. Research has also shown that cultural values of autonomy and embeddedness have significant implications on the interactions and trust building between people (Yamagishi, Cook, & Watabe, 1998). More specifically, people in embedded cultures will consider another person as trustworthy *after* they build some kind of a relationship.

We drew on cultural dimensions such as Hofstede's power distance (Hofstede, 1980) and gender egalitarianism of the GLOBE study (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) to reflect differences in the roles, positions and expectations for men and women. The importance of different status of people in one culture versus the equal treatment of everyone in another culture reflects these differences. Finally, we also incorporated differences resulting from Trompenaar's neutral vs. affective and sequential vs. synchronous cultures (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2011). For example, whether it is acceptable to express emotions openly or not defined a culture as affective or neutral, respectively. Similarly, differences in time orientation were reflected in the perception of time, and whether certain activities were considered a waste of time.

There are multiple learning goals of this simulation exercise. The growing field of cross-cultural management refers to the adaptation by managers to the different cultural practices prevalent outside one's home country (Bird & Mendenhall, 2016). Yet, managers are not always prepared adequately to deal with the complexities of a cross-cultural situation. For instance, lacking proper understanding of cultural differences often results in failing to conclude a cross-cultural negotiation successfully (Black & Mendenhall, 1989). Awareness of differences could minimize such failures. So, the first objective of this exercise is to help participants recognize the importance of researching a target culture so that they are aware of potential differences. Applying the relevant cultural frameworks can help students understand these differences. Second, the exercise aims at teaching students to learn to adapt to target culture's values and expectations in a live setting, thereby demonstrating high cross-cultural adaptability. A third objective of the exercise is to enhance cross-cultural knowledge and competency while learning to shed attitudes that may potentially hinder successful cross-cultural interaction.

Last, the exercise has the objective to help develop skills related to expatriate assignment, diversity training, and in particular, cross-cultural negotiation. This exercise is uniquely useful for teaching cross-cultural negotiation because it captures all three aspects that are relevant for negotiation in a cross-cultural setting – (i) substance, referring to the objective that is at stake; (ii) relationship, including emotions experienced by the negotiators; and (iii) process, reflecting people's attitude, techniques, behaviors, etc., that determine how negotiation is conducted (Poitras et al., 2013). For instance, it incorporates various elements of high and low context cultures (such as communication) that

impact negotiation (Adair & Brett, 2005). Thus, a successful meeting in this exercise would imply that the participants were able to address all three negotiation aspects (i.e. substance, relationship and process) in a cross-cultural setting.

“Business Meeting” simulation

The Business Meeting is an experiential learning activity to help students develop cultural competency and apply their knowledge and skills as they are exposed to a “culturally diverse” negotiation setting. It refers to the meeting conducted between negotiating parties from two different cultures to determine their suitability for further business relationships. For this purpose, each group of participants will take turns acting as “host” and “visitor.” A visitor group is one that travels to the others' “home” for the meeting while the host receives the visitor for the meeting. The visitor group is expected to present a case to make a business deal. Depending on the evaluation of the visitor, the host will decide whether or not to pursue a business relationship with the visitor. Then, the roles will be reversed whereby the group acting as visitor will take on the role of host and vice-versa. Note, however, that while they will take turns to act as both visitor and host, each participant will be exposed to information regarding the requirements of their own culture only. Thus, for the purpose of this exercise, participants will have two meetings with group(s) in the other culture – once as a visitor and again as host. This design exposes the students to perspectives of a host as well as a visitor to other cultures. Each interaction, however, will be independent of the other meeting with the same group of participants for the purpose of this exercise. Thus, a group's experience as visitor should not influence their decision as host in any way. The reason for focusing on only the hosted meeting for decision-making is to show the importance of cultural adaptability in determining of one's effectiveness in a new culture. If a visiting group is unable to behave appropriately in a host culture, then the host culture's decision will not favor the visiting group, thereby reflecting the visitors' inability to perform effectively in a host culture. It is important to ensure that evaluation of other culture groups is based on how they behave when visiting a host culture.

Although a large class size allows for this exercise to be conducted effectively, it can be conducted with very few participants (as few as six) and does not require the critical size of other more elaborate exercises. Consequently, it can be used by instructors teaching cross-cultural management in schools or universities

that do not have a large international business program. Moreover, it requires no special material, thereby making it possible to be administered by programs with limited resources. At the same time, the exercise retains a certain level of complexity to convey the relevant points of cross-cultural negotiation to the participants in order to minimize the limitation of a simulated experience (Poitras et al., 2013).

For this exercise, students are assigned to one of the two fictitious cultures and formed into teams. Each team is given instructions on their culture and their objective. They are told that they will be having their initial meetings with potential business partners from the other culture.

When a team visits another culture, they will be expected to follow the cultural expectations of the home cultural group. Based on their instructions and evaluation of their interaction experience, each home team will either decide to do or not do business with their visitors. Figure 1 presents a flowchart showing the steps for the simulation exercise. The instructions for each culture are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Resources required

Participants for this activity are divided into two cultures – Republic of Manu and New Martland. They are

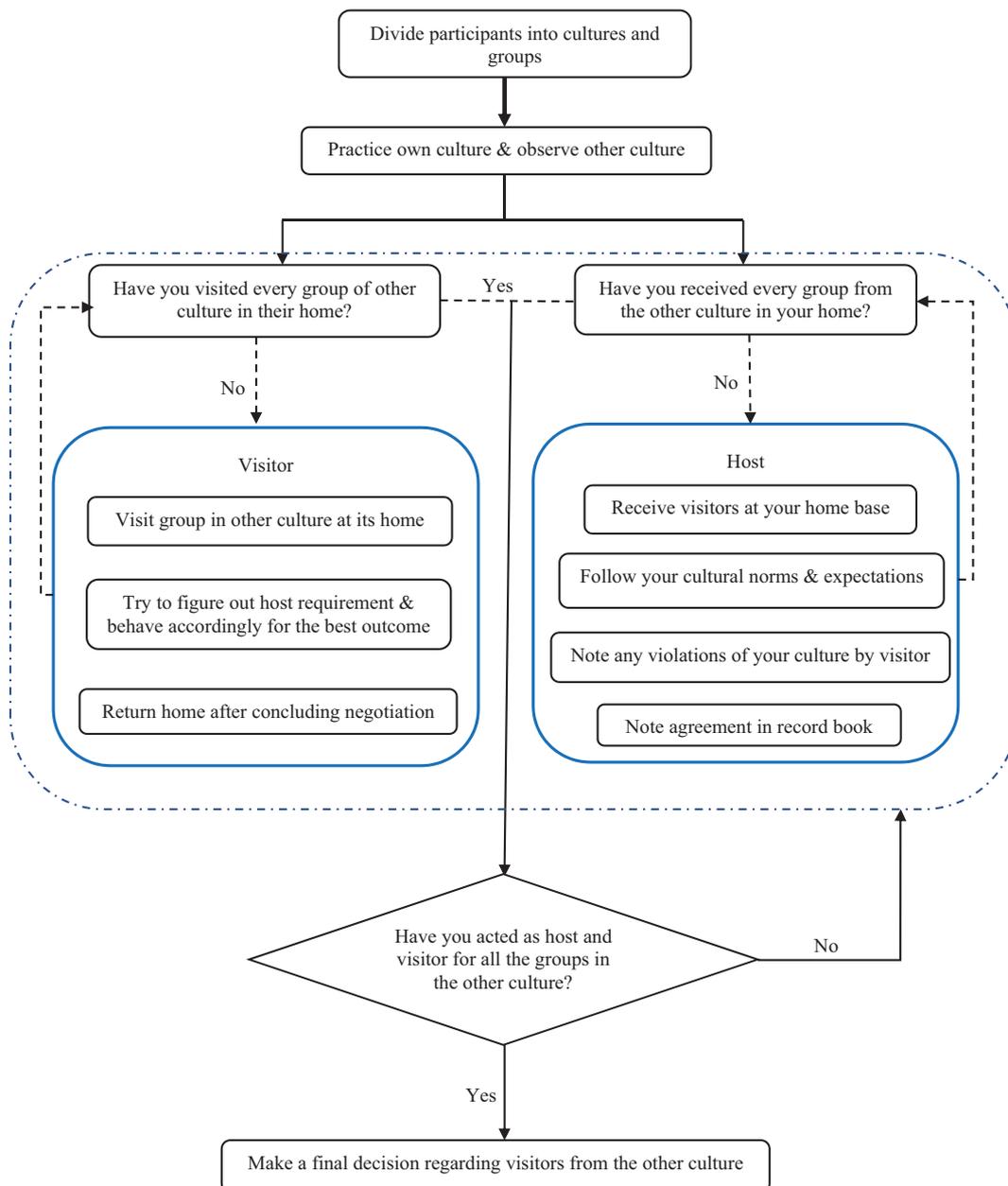


Figure 1. Flowchart for business meeting.

provided with instructions for the culture to which they are assigned. Then, they are separated so that they can learn about their own culture without the other culture members overhearing the instructions. However, the participants can learn about the other cultures by observing from a distance. For this purpose, opposite ends of a room may be used as home bases for each culture. Participants will be provided with a stack of index cards to be used as a “record book” for each team that visits them. One index card should be used for each group of visitors (see [Appendix C](#)). They will make notes about the visits as well as the outcome of their negotiation with visiting teams on these record books. Additionally, they will be provided with an index card to note their final decision outcome after all the visits are concluded.

One of the advantages of this simulation exercise is that it does not require any additional material. It can be conducted in any classroom setting. Other cross-cultural simulations, such as Bafa-Bafa or Barnga, require cards and/or chips that may get damaged or lost (Sullivan & Duplaga, 1997; Thiagarajan & Thiagarajan, 2011). Business Meeting requires no such special material and hence, is a cost-effective alternative. Moreover, it can be conducted by one or two facilitators in a single classroom, which makes it an easy simulation exercise for any program that has limited resources.

Exercise set-up

This exercise can be conducted with a minimum of 6–8 participants. While it is possible to run it in large groups, it is conveniently suited for groups of 16 to 24 participants, where four teams in total can be created and each team from one culture can visit and host both teams from the other culture. Students should be divided into the two equal-sized cultures of Republic of Manu and New Martland, with men and women well represented in both cultures. Since the two cultures differ in characteristics related to gender roles and expectations, significant representations of both genders in each culture is important for the learning outcomes.

Next, depending on the size of the group, smaller teams of three to six people are created, again keeping good representations of both genders in all teams. The team size should be such that they are large enough for members to experience team dynamics, but not too large as it may inhibit active participation in the exercise. For instance, in a class with eight students, there will be one four-person team representing Republic of Manu and one four-person team from New Martland culture. On the other hand, in a larger group of

participants of, say, 24 students, there could be two six person teams in each culture.

Each team will get an opportunity to visit all the teams of the other culture as well as to host visits from all the teams of the other culture in order to evaluate potential partners according to their cultural rules and expectations. When the visits are concluded, each team will decide whether they will partner with any team from the other culture, based on their evaluation of the meetings when the other culture groups visited them, and if yes, which one would be chosen for this purpose. The decision for each team should always be based on the meeting when the group hosted the visitors, and not based on their own visit (see [Figure 1](#) for a detailed flowchart).

The total time required to run the exercise, including 25 minutes for debrief, can vary from 70 minutes (one team per culture) to 90 minutes (two teams per culture), with the following approximate timing for each step – five minutes for introduction and division into cultures and teams, five minutes for reading the instructions and one’s own cultural values and expectations, 10 minutes for students to practice their own culture and for observation of the other culture (see [Table 1](#)). The total visit time will change for larger groups of participants, thereby changing the total time required to conduct the exercise. For example, if there are a total of four teams (two in each culture) and each team interacts with a team from the target culture for about 10 minutes each, it will take about 20 minutes for one team to visit both the foreign culture teams. After that, it will need to host the meetings from both the teams from the other culture, requiring an additional 20 minutes. Hence, each team will need 40 minutes to conclude all the meetings. Finally, five minutes should be assigned for teams to make decisions.

Table 1. Timing of the exercise.

Step	Description	Time required [minutes]
Introduction	Instructor explains the exercise and create teams.	5
Instructions	Participants quietly read instructions and cultural norms.	5
Practice	Teams practice their own cultural norms and observe the other culture.	10
Visiting + Hosting	Each team has to visit and host teams from the other culture.	10 + 10
Decision Making	Teams choose a business partner from the other culture.	5
Debrief	Instructor facilitates discussion as suggested in this paper.	25
Total time		70

Note: In case of two teams per culture, there will be an additional “Visiting + Hosting” step.

Conducting the exercise

Once the participants understand the rules of the exercise, with emphasis on creating and maintaining a safe learning space (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015), the facilitators will ensure that all the teams practice their cultural expectations (Appendix A, Appendix B) as per the instructions provided to them to correct any misunderstandings and to clarify the cultural requirements. Participants should learn their culture so well that they do not need to refer to their instructions once the visits to the other culture begins. Since each culture will be practicing their own norms and expected behavior in their corner of the room that is shared by others as well, they will get an opportunity to observe how the other cultures behave during this time. The opportunity to observe is similar to real-life situations where people gain some potentially useful knowledge about other cultures by being exposed to them through various media while lacking in-depth insight into the target culture that comes from closer interaction with that culture. If the participants use this observation period properly, it will enable them to learn about the other culture's norms and expectations, allowing them to interact more successfully when visiting the other culture. We recommend that the exercise be conducted with everyone standing to ensure unrestricted freedom of movement to allow cultural gestures to be made properly. The interaction session needs to be proctored closely to ensure instructions are followed.

It should be noted that other than the objective of the meetings and cultural expectations, participants are not given specific directions as to how to behave or what to say when they visit the other culture. This ambiguity is intentional because a key purpose of the exercise is to increase students' cultural awareness and assessment of their own cultural intelligence. Their cultural intelligence would require them to self-determine how to interact with the other culture and what would be appropriate to discuss at the meeting in order to achieve their objective. People high on cultural intelligence will focus on adapting to the other culture in order to maximize their chances of success in the negotiation while others may not do it successfully (Wu & Ang, 2011). Either way, they would have learned about their strengths and weaknesses in a cross-cultural situation from this experience. Thus, the lack of specific directions as to how to behave or what to say when visiting the other culture is an effective way of teaching the participants how their "soft skills" impact their performance outcomes in a cross-cultural setting (Halfhill & Nielsen, 2007).

Once the visits are concluded, all teams will need to decide whether or not they will choose to partner with any of the visiting teams. Any visiting team that violated more than eight host cultural norms or expectations will be eliminated from consideration. This hard rule is consistent

with real-life situations where lack of cross-cultural competency impacts performance (Wu & Ang, 2011). If the visiting teams satisfy the minimum cultural requirements, only then will they be considered for partnership. Based on the notes taken by each team during the visits, they will be asked to write their final partnering decision on an index card and hand it to the facilitator to be revealed later.

Discussion

Debrief

The debrief session can be started by revealing the decisions taken by each team of participants. The instructions for decision-making should clearly indicate that they should choose a team from the opposite culture as a partner only if they satisfy all the criteria that were provided to them.

During the debrief, it is helpful to allow students to see exactly how effectively they were able to assess the other culture. To this end, students in each culture could be asked the following questions:

- *How would you describe the other culture?* Participants should answer this question about the culture they visited. The instructor should list these characteristics noted by the visitors to a culture on a whiteboard. Typically, it will include both positive and negative characterization of the other culture. However, groups that fail to understand the other cultures are often puzzled by the host culture's behaviors and norms and are more likely to evaluate them negatively than others. For instance, in one exercise, participants from New Martland described those from Republic of Manu as being not friendly since the latter did not return their hugs. They failed to understand that touching strangers in Manu culture is not consistent with their values and assumed that it was a sign of rudeness. This example illustrates how our own cultural assumptions influence our perception of others.
- *Why do you think that the other culture behaved that way?* This question will allow students to reflect more deeply to understand the other culture. It will also require them to probe into their perceptions and try to identify the reasons behind them. People from other cultures have different perspectives and values that cause them to behave differently. For instance, in one exercise, participants from New Martland were frequently looking at their watch and seemed reluctant to discuss anything other than business. During the debrief, a successful group from Manu culture explained that although inconsistent with their own assigned

culture's values and the action potentially appearing to be rude, the frequent glances at the watch caused them to pick on the value of time in New Martland and adjust their behavior accordingly during their visit. In subsequent discussions, the students who negotiated successfully noted observing this behavior of their host. They mentioned how they interpreted it and adjusted their own behavior accordingly.

Alternately, given the importance of time in New Martland, participants from that culture may feel impatient because of the tendency to talk about non-partnering topics when interacting with those from Republic of Manu, since New Martland may consider such conversations to be wasted time. Further reflection, however, may help them realize that the conversation is meant to help Manus know them better and gauge whether or not they can trust their potential partners. This realization could cause people to be more tolerant towards such apparently non-task related interactions. Some students mentioned that while that made sense on reflection, they had not realized it at the time of the exercise. It is a mistake that could prove costly in a real-life business situation. This example makes the exercise particularly useful because it forces participants to think outside their frame of reference and to become more aware of different perspectives of other cultures. This effect is evident from responses to student assignments on cultural conflict where students are required to report a real incident of cultural conflict and analyze it. Many students refer to the experiential activity and draw from it to illustrate how such cultural differences in perspectives had led to misunderstandings in real-life situation. This type of reflection indicates that the experiential activity achieves its objectives effectively.

- *Can you describe your own assigned culture, its values, and objectives to the other group?* When participants describe their own culture's values and expectations to the class, these discussions allow the students to compare their prior perceptions of the other culture to the true information being conveyed. It is possible that many students will feel they had misunderstood elements of the other culture or jumped to erroneous conclusions. Cultural misunderstandings are common challenges in cross-cultural situations in real-life as well and hence, need to be realized. We believe it is very important to recognize that while we experience elements of other cultures, we do not always understand them correctly, which is why it is important to keep an open mind. This exercise allows participants to experience the significance of such multiple perspectives in diverse cultures. It illustrates how easy

it is to misunderstand or to be misunderstood by other cultures by exposing the participants to both the perspectives of visitors and hosts. Additionally, this awareness will also allow the participants to learn whether or not their responses to the situation was appropriate when visiting the other culture.

- *Analyze the two cultures using various cultural frameworks.* This analysis is very helpful for cross-cultural management classes that teach students about different cultural frameworks. For instance, Republic of Manu can be identified as having synchronous culture, where it is important to ensure that people take the time to get to know each other and relationships do not get ignored just to meet deadline (see [Appendix A](#)). Alternatively, given that time is highly valued and the people do not chitchat in the culture of New Martland (see [Appendix B](#)), the culture can be identified as being sequential. As another example, students can use Schwartz' cultural framework (Schwartz, 2011) and discuss the aspects of egalitarianism vs. hierarchy and autonomy vs. embeddedness manifested in Republic of Manu and New Martland. The exercise allows students to practice identifying cultures using the various frameworks based on their norms and behaviors. Some students have used the experiential exercise as an example to respond to questions on cultural frameworks in exams, thereby demonstrating its effectiveness in helping them learn about these frameworks.

Lessons learned

There are some important lessons to be learned through this experiential activity. First, typically, groups that spend more time observing the other culture while practicing their own, do better during their visit to the other culture and conclude their negotiations successfully, as reflected in the decisions by other culture's group(s) that choose to work with them. One student said that he had figured out how to behave in the other culture when he observed their interaction before visiting them. This observation reflects the importance of researching a culture before getting exposed to it. Visitors have a better understanding of the things that are important or valued in the other culture when they learn about the host and hence, are better prepared to deal with the challenges of interacting with the other culture. It is an important lesson because it implies that doing proper research on the culture of potential

business partners *before* going to meet them is more likely to result in successful business.

Second, a related lesson is that the exercise demonstrates that participants who may not have known about norms of the other culture but are able to adapt to the behavior of the other culture are also successful. This lesson indicates a level of cultural intelligence that allows the visitors to make sense of the unfamiliar norms and expectations and function effectively when interacting with that culture (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Wu & Ang, 2011).

Third, by a show of hands, ask how many of the students would have liked to be in the culture other than the one they were assigned to. With the exception of a few students who may have been assigned to cultures with values very different from their real-life values, the majority of students usually tend to prefer the culture they were assigned to for the purpose of the exercise. This result suggests that in the course of the exercise, many of them start to identify themselves with their fictitious cultures, despite being randomly assigned. Even the responses during debrief suggests an “us versus them” mentality between the cultures that indicates a strong identification with their assigned culture. It is noteworthy that if participants identify themselves with arbitrarily formed fictitious cultures in a period of less than two hours, a lifelong identification with the culture where one is born can only result in very deeply ingrained values and a strong identification with it. Consequently, when exposed to cultures with other values, it becomes that much more difficult to see things from other perspectives.

Fourth, this activity not only creates cross-cultural awareness and causes students to reflect on their own competency, it has the additional value of teaching them about negotiating across cultures. Cultural assumptions in traditional negotiations teaching impact their usefulness in a different cultural setting (Bordone & Viscomi, 2015). As noted by Adair and Brett (2005), negotiators from different cultures have different expectations of the negotiation process that can result in difficulty in synchronization and failure to negotiate effectively. For instance, participants from New Martland will not be able to conduct a successful negotiation with Manus unless they take the time to build trust. On the other hand, those from Republic of Manus will not be able to impress those from New Martland by taking too much time to discuss their families. Hence, it is important to understand that the negotiation techniques that are very effective in one’s own culture may fail to deliver this result in another culture. Business Meeting is distinct from other cross-cultural simulations because of its focus on the ability of a person to adapt his/her negotiation skills to different cultures. Even when the purpose of negotiation is cut and dry, this exercise teaches students the importance of being

able to adapt to different cultural requirements and to use different negotiation strategies accordingly for successful outcomes.

Simulation assessment

There are various cross-cultural training exercises that may be used by instructors to develop general cross-cultural skills of students. They do not, however, necessarily teach students specific business skills to accomplish their objectives in cross-cultural settings. For instance, Bafa-Bafa, a very popular cross-cultural exercise, allows students to visit and make sense of an unfamiliar culture. However, the visitors are not required to accomplish any specific objective while in the other culture. So, even if they fail to adapt successfully in the host culture, the visitors do not lose anything of significance. Consequently, students may not fully appreciate the importance of developing cross-cultural competency for business purposes.

There are also exercises to teach students valuable business skills such as negotiation (e.g. Robinson, 2017) and conflict management (Ferris, 2009). These are very effective for teaching about specific skills and concepts relevant to management students, but they do not teach students how these skills need to be modified in different cultural settings. We believe that the Business Meeting is a valuable learning tool because it helps develop *both* cross-cultural competency and basic negotiation skills of students. It not only demonstrates the challenges of cultural differences but also teaches students how to adapt a key management skill to conduct business successfully. This design makes the Business Meeting a unique exercise and sets it apart from other management simulation exercises.

This exercise was designed for teaching cross-cultural negotiation to business students. In order to ensure that students are able to draw from their experience of this activity and apply this experience to the concepts covered in the class, we noted actions and decisions taken by students during the exercise and discussed them to underscore relevant lessons. In subsequent class meetings, instances from the activity were often used to illustrate key points. It helped them to recall certain challenges they experienced during their cross-cultural interaction rather than to discuss them at the cognitive level. The general sentiment reflected in student comments suggested that they enjoyed applying theories from class to the exercise. They clearly noted that the experiential learning activity helped with their learning by allowing them to apply material from the class. Moreover, they referred to instances from the exercise to illustrate points during class discussions

and their exams, thereby validating the relevance of the exercise for teaching such management courses.

We conducted a further assessment to determine the effectiveness of the simulation. Consequently, one of the groups that participated in this exercise, a class of 42 students, was asked to anonymously complete an abridged version of the Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory (CCAI; Kelley & Meyers, 1995), and to describe briefly how the exercise helped them learn to deal with challenges in cross-cultural situations. The CCAI scale has been used in the past to assess effectiveness in cross-cultural interactions (Nguyen et al., 2010). For the purpose of this assessment, fifteen items that provided an abridged but adequate representation for each dimension of the scale were chosen. These items were used to assess the effectiveness of the experiential learning activity on cross-cultural adaptability of participating students. However, due to reliability concerns of the measure, emotional resilience was dropped from the study. We collected data for both before and after the exercise to determine the effectiveness of the exercise. Out of the 42 students who participated in the exercise, we received 25 completed surveys. Although we failed to find any significant effect for personal autonomy, our analysis indicated statistically significant improvements for flexibility/openness and perceptual acuity dimensions¹. The results suggest that the Business Meeting simulation improves one's ability to read and interpret others' verbal and non-verbal communication more accurately and develop relationships with people from other cultures. We acknowledge that these results should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size. However, the strength of this exercise was reinforced by participants' descriptions of how it helped them in assessing and solving challenges in cross-cultural interactions. In their written comments, students documented that the simulation helped them to be more open, understanding, flexible and respectful towards people from other cultures, and to pay more attention to verbal and non-verbal communication in cross-cultural interactions. They also indicated their realization that cultural differences may hinder successful business interactions, thereby stressing the necessity of learning basic norms and rules of people from the other culture before doing business with them.

Conclusion

We were motivated to design the Business Meeting simulation because we recognized the need for an experiential learning activity that was complex enough to require the combination of cross-cultural competency, negotiation and management skills. To this end, we drew from prior research and teaching materials and created an exercise that involved people from two different cultures to interact

and negotiate a tangible business outcome. In doing so, it makes students aware of some of the critical skills required for a successful international management career. The exercise allows participants to reflect on their cross-cultural competency and to use their skills and knowledge to negotiate in a cross-cultural business setting. Consequently, this exercise can be used to teach cross-cultural management as well as negotiations. The discussion in this paper is meant to provide a general guideline. It is possible to modify the exercise to focus on different teaching points depending on the requirements of a particular course.

Note

1. We conducted confirmatory factor analysis and paired t-tests. Details of these results may be furnished upon request.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

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Appendix A Instructions for Republic of Manu

Republic of Manu

Objective: Make a business deal with a group of representatives from New Martland whereby you can enter a partnership with maximum control over technological know-how and market.

Context: You are a member of the Republic of Manu culture. The top management team of your company has identified significant business opportunity in partnering with a firm from the New Martland culture. You have valuable technological capability but you need help getting access to the growing New Martland market. There are 40 key distributors in the New Martland market and 50 key technological aspects that are patented by Manu companies in this industry. You want them to work with your company's representatives directly. You are willing to share your technological know-how with a partner that you trust by sharing some of your 50 patented technology with them. Consequently, the two issues to be negotiated are in terms of percentage of control on technological know-how and market access. However, you have been instructed to not consider any proposition that gives you less than 70% control on technology (i.e. no more than a maximum of 15 patented technology is to be shared with the partner) or less than 20% control on the market (i.e. your partner should allow for a minimum of eight distributors to work with your representatives directly). Other than that, how you behave at the meetings and what you talk about to accomplish your goals is completely up to you.

Currently, your firm has shortlisted some potential partners from New Martland. The initial meeting has been scheduled with them. Your job is to meet with them and decide if you would recommend them for further consideration. During the meeting, you will try to retain maximum possible control on technical know-how, while trying to gain as much access to their market as possible. The desired outcome of your negotiation are mutually agreed numbers for the two criteria that will be entered in your "record book" for the visiting teams. However, it is possible to not arrive at a mutual agreement at the end of a meeting. Visitors to your culture need to be mindful of your values. Some of your key cultural values and norms are as follows:

- Republic of Manu culture is group oriented and everything is done for the good of the whole. Pursuing a person's self-interest is considered to be selfish in this culture.
- Republic of Manu culture is basically a patriarchal society. Here, men have higher status than women. Republic of Manu men do not like to be questioned or asked to explain themselves. Final decisions are taken by the men in the group, although they may listen to the women's views.
- Women in this culture do not talk directly to men from other cultures unless a relationship has already been established with a particular foreign individual by the men in their own group. However, Manu men can talk to men from other cultures.
- Although it is not uncommon for Manu men to touch the shoulder of women in their own culture, touching strangers is frowned upon. People in this culture prefer to maintain a greater distance when talking to people.
- People in Republic of Manu have formal speech patterns. For example, they always use "Sir" and "Madam" or appropriate official titles such as "Dr." when addressing others.

- Before beginning any work-related discussion, it is expected that everyone present will discuss their families. Manus believe that this helps them to build a trusting personal relationship and to understand other people.
- People in Republic of Manu value relationship and avoid conflict. People in this culture do not express a lot of emotions. They consider it rude to point out anyone's mistakes. However, if someone violates Manu cultural expectations, they show their disapproval by turning their head away or avoiding eye contact when talking to the violators.
- Trust and relationship are extremely important in Manu culture. They will not consider conducting business with anyone who has not earned their trust.

When representatives from the other culture come to visit your culture, they need to figure out and conform to your culture, as described above. Cultural violations committed by the visitors should be marked (X) in the "record book". If a team of representative gets eight or more violations, they failed to satisfy your cultural requirements and are unable to prove themselves worthy of consideration as your business partner. If more than one team of representative gets fewer than eight violations, then it implies that they understood your culture adequately and are worthy of consideration for partnering. In that case, you will need to choose the team with the least violations. In the event of a tie, you will choose the team that offers you the best deal in terms of control on technological know-how and access to market.

Remember:

- You need to make your decision on the New Martland team based on how they behave when they visit you and whether they satisfy your culture's values when negotiating with you. Your experience when visiting them should not impact this decision.
- During New Martland's visit to your culture, you should behave in a manner consistent with the Republic of Manu culture. If your visitors violate your cultural expectations, you can indicate your disapproval in a manner consistent with Republic of Manu culture while noting it in your record book discretely, but you cannot explicitly tell them what they did wrong. They need to figure it out on their own.
- When the New Martland members visit you, they need to adapt and conform to your expectations. However, when you visit them, you should not expect them to display Republic of Manu cultural values at that time.

Appendix B Instructions for New Martland

New Martland

Objective: Make a business deal with a group of representatives from Republic of Manu whereby you can enter a partnership with maximum control over technological know-how and market.

Context: You are a member of the New Martland culture. The top management team of your company has identified significant business opportunity in partnering with a firm from

Republic of Manu culture. There are 40 key distributors in the New Martland market and 50 key technological aspects that are patented by Manu companies in this industry. You are well connected with the distributors in the growing New Martland market but you lack the technological capability required to remain competitive in the market. You need access to some of their cutting-edge technology. You are willing to help connect potential partners to the New Martland market provided you do not lose complete control of the partnership. There are 40 key distributors in your market and you prefer that they deal with your own company's representatives rather than that of your partner's representatives as much as possible. Consequently, the two areas to be negotiated are percentage of control on market access and technological know-how. However, you have been instructed to not consider any proposition that gives you less than 70% control on market (i.e. you need to ensure that at least 28 of the distributors continue to work with your company's representatives) or less than 20% control on the technology (i.e. you need to have access to a minimum of 10 of the relevant patented technology). Other than that, how you behave at the meetings and what you talk about to accomplish your goals is completely up to you.

Currently, your firm has shortlisted some potential partners from Republic of Manu with the necessary patents. The initial meeting has been scheduled with them. Your job is to meet with them and decide if you would recommend them for further consideration. During the meeting, you will try to retain maximum possible control on the market, while trying to gain as much access to their technological know-how as possible. The desired outcomes of your negotiation are mutually agreed numbers for the two criteria that will be entered in your "record book" for the visiting teams. However, it is possible to not come to a mutual agreement at the end of a meeting. Visitors to your culture need to be mindful of your values. Some of your key cultural values and norms are as follows:

- People in New Martland culture are competitive and go-getters.
- This culture is informal and friendly. It is common to call everyone by his or her first name, even when it is a relatively new acquaintance.
- Among New Martlanders, there are no differences in gender roles. Men and women are treated equally and behave in the same way. People here are democratic in their decision-making.
- People in New Martland are outgoing. It is common practice to greet others by hugging them to make them feel welcome. They are comfortable standing very close to people when talking.
- It is important to make eye contact in New Martland. Avoiding eye contact is considered rude and suggests a possible attempt to hide something.
- New Martlanders understand the value of time, so they like to get down to business quickly instead of engaging in prolonged chitchat. They believe in keeping personal and private life separate and do not consider it appropriate to discuss their personal life with anyone in a work setting.
- People in this culture are emotional. They do not avoid conflict. If someone violates their cultural expectations, they do not hesitate to call the offender rude.

- New Martlanders tend to evaluate each business opportunity on its specific merits. As long as they see value in a particular deal, they are willing to consider doing business. They put aside their personal feelings about others when considering deals.

When representatives from the other culture come to visit you, they need to figure out and conform to your culture, as described above. Cultural violations committed by the visitors should be marked (X) in the "record book." If a team of representatives gets eight or more violations, they failed to satisfy your cultural requirements and are unable to prove themselves worthy of consideration as your business partner. If more than one team of representatives gets fewer than eight violations, it implies that they understood your culture adequately and are worthy of your consideration for partnering. In that case, you will need to choose the team with the fewest violations. In the event of a tie, you will choose the team that offers you the best deal in terms of control on technological know-how and access to market.

Remember:

- You need to make your decision on the Republic of Manu teams based on how they behave when they visit you and your cultural expectations from them. Your experience when visiting them should not impact this decision.
- During Republic of Manu's visit to your culture, you should behave in a manner consistent with the New Martland culture. If your visitors violate your cultural expectations, you can indicate your disapproval in a manner consistent with New Martland culture while noting it in your record book discretely, but you cannot explicitly tell them what they did wrong. They need to figure it out on their own.
- When the Republic of Manu members visit you, they need to adapt to and conform to your expectations. However, when you visit them, you should not expect them to display New Martland cultural values at that time.

Appendix C Sample Record Book

Visiting team:

Place an X in the Violation Tally for each violation by the visitors of your cultural expectations and norms.

Violation tally:

Negotiation agreement (Choose one):

I. Agreement reached

Your market control: distributors will work with your company representatives

Your technological control: of the relevant technology patents will be there for you

II. Agreement not reached